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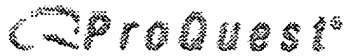
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Wilson Memorial Hospital of Wilson, N.C., signed a contract with Management Systems Associates Inc. of Raleigh, N.C. to provide optical imaging solutions for its health care system. Wilson is licensed for 317 beds and needed imaging to **automate its medical records, patient billing, data storage and patient care information.** MSA's solution can be used enterprise-wide, enabling the caregivers to access **patient information** across the hospital from different departments, say hospital administrators. One feature particularly helpful to the hospital is its multi-user access, says Rex Burnworth, hospital's director of materiel management and **information services.** (Management Systems Associates, 919/851-6177.)

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Mail order pharmaceuticals

Judy Bassett. *Inform*. Silver Spring: *Mar 1998*. Vol.12, Iss. 3; pg. 30, 2 pgs

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Abstract (Article Summary)

CFI, a major US mail order prescription drug company, is a leader in a growing industry. With over half of CFI's labor costs in its highly skilled, clinically trained team of professional pharmacists, Don Schell, president and CEO of CFI, realized that in order to keep costs under control, CFI would need to turn to technology and process automation in order to manage growth and productivity. To do so, CFI began in 1995 a major redesign of business processes to bring together all key information directly to pharmacists' desktops. CFI selected Logical Software Solutions Corp.'s FLOWMAN to link their existing applications database systems, and hardware platforms to automate handling of their business exception processes. Using FLOWMAN, CFI was able to build an enterprise system utilizing new applications and mainframe systems at one-third the cost of a turnkey customer service/quality control solution.

Full Text (1339 words)

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[Headnote]

Pharmaceutical business develops technology system to enhance quality control and customer service

The changes sweeping the healthcare system have ushered in many new services for the American healthcare consumer, including mail order pharmaceutical companies. Employee health organizations and insurance companies can now take advantage of lower cost prescriptions and pharmaceutical services directly through agreements with these pharmacy benefit management (PBM) providers. Business is booming in this highly competitive, highly regulated marketplace. CFI, a major U.S. mail order prescription drug company, is a leader in this growing industry. With plant sites in Harrisburg, Penn. and East Hanover, N.J., CFI has made zero error tolerance its central business imperative and places customer service as the highest priority.

With over half of CFI's labor costs in its highly skilled, clinically trained team of professional pharmacists, Don Schell, president and CEO of CFI realized that in order to keep costs under control CFI would need to turn to technology and process automation in order to manage growth and productivity. To do so, in 1995 under the direction of Tony Panettieri, executive vice president, and Michael Perry, vice president of Information Technology, CFI began a major redesign of business processes to bring together all key information directly to pharmacists' desktops. The goal was to enable the pharmacists to function at maximum efficiency, ensure the highest levels of quality control and institute planned process automation throughout the enterprise.

"This is primarily an in-house solution designed and developed by CFI employees who understand the business process," said Tony Panettieri. "The system provides total control over the flow of every order and immediate access to all associated documentation, history and order status which enhances our ability to respond to our customers' needs."

The new system that came on line in 1996 was designed to process a total of 7,500 prescriptions per eight hour shift per site or a total of 3.6 million prescriptions annually, boosting CFI's capacity almost 50 percent.

Taking Exception

With quality control and customer service the top priorities of CFI, the redesigned processes worked well and increased capacity but both plant sites began experiencing backlogs in the exception handling processes. Since the company was posting rapid growth and expansion, the backlog for exception processing was proving very costly and slowing product delivery. The exception process management issue was a particularly thorny problem since it encompassed the full business process and all technology systems.

Since business process exceptions occur at any step of the business process from ordering through shipping and at all business locations, an exception handling system had to be capable of interacting with the entire enterprise. The company needed a technology product that could be quickly installed and could link disparate technologies like OCR/ICR/bar code reading, document management, word-processing, quality control systems applications, as well as specialized legacy systems and mainframe applications. Also due to the extremely fast rate of growth, the company wanted an adaptive technology solution which did not lock them into closed hardware or a system platform.

CFI selected Logical Software Solutions Corporation's (LSS) FLOWMAN to link their existing applications database systems, and hardware platforms to automate handling of their business exception processes. FLOWMAN's enterprise framework interface provides the enterprise a communication "pipeline" that allows legacy and other business applications to be linked into a collaborative solution which can expand throughout the enterprise and across various technologies.

Using FLOWMAN, CFI was able to build an enterprise system utilizing new applications and mainframe systems at one-third the cost of a turnkey customer service/quality control solution The System

The system integrates LSS' FLOWMAN enterprise application framework and workflow, Diamond Head's Toolkit Wordscan OCR, ICR/bar code reading, document management, word-processing, quality control systems applications, as well as links to specialized legacy systems and mainframe applications. The system uses a Sybase database on a Windows NT client/server environment using a TCP/IP Local Area Network (LAN), and stores images using OTG Disk Extender for archival needs.

The goal was to establish an exception handling system that would interact with the full range of systems and technologies, speed up process time and ensure quality control. Quality control is critical errors are simply unacceptable in this industry.

The exception handling system interacts with the majority of the 13-step enterprise business process from the initial order stage – including mail, phone and fax orders – through the pharmacy prescription filling stage to individual product labeling and order shipping and delivery. The automated exception process system had to: integrate with the packaged prescription drug interaction warning system application; allow for special pharmaceutical service requests; provide for routine client **medical** cross-checks; maintain **medical information on patients'** prescription drug **records** and current physicians' prescriptions; maintain prescription history and dosages; and **automate** business processes for client **billing** and insurance claims.

With the new system, customers can mail, fax or have the physician phone in pharmaceutical orders. The first portion of the system handles the administrative activities including scanning in the prescription, verifying the customer's eligibility, co-payment and insurance status online and updating any medical or financial/insurance changes. The process then takes the prescription to the trained pharmacists where the script and patient prescription history are reviewed and possible drug interactions screened online. The CFI system will also conduct a drug utilization review during which certain mainframe databases take into account other drug prescriptions that have been filled by other pharmacy management systems to cross check against possible patient drug interactions. Pharmacists are constantly available for patient questions and regularly interact with physicians. In fact, the new CFI desktop system allows pharmacists to answer patient questions more rapidly. If there is a change in dosage, pharmacists will take the time to explain the new procedures, interactions and possible side effects and answer any questions, even contact the physician on behalf of the patient.

Finally, the prescription is sent by a conveyor system to the pharmacy office for filling and a final quality control check where the filling pharmacists compare the product and packaging to an online pharmacy video catalogue as well as online manifest before packing and shipping the order out to the customer.

CFI is reporting improved exception handling capability and enhanced quality control benefits, as well as increased new business process capacity from this FLOWMAN installation. As evidenced in a 1997 industry survey, CFI is listed among the top three in the industry in customer satisfaction and value. In the first year of full system operation, CFI posted an increase of 30% in revenues and increased capacity using the existing labor force. CFI plans to recover the technology costs in 18 months of operation.

This technological approach reflects the corporation's requirements for an adaptive system that can expand and change process design as the business process demands. With FLOWMAN, this new automated exception handling system has resulted in multiple benefits for the corporation in improved process efficiency and productivity. Additionally, the system also has increased CFI's business capability by enabling CFI to design and test new business opportunities and operations outside of main business production and quickly link the new business process to the existing framework processes.

Future Plans

With the market continuing to grow, CFI is poised to meet the demand and also expand to additional lines of business. The technology system is designed to accommodate much larger customer production and expansion at the two facilities and the FLOWMAN system is designed to handle this growth without major retooling. "We are very pleased with the FLOWMAN technology and believe this is the key to increasing CFI business capacity and controlling cost." *

[Sidebar]

Improvements to business process exception handling including faster handling of customer cases and complaints. Enhances quality control and process cross-checks. Ensures accuracy and completeness of customer information, reducing order errors, and ensuring enhanced retention of critical data. Provides easier tracking of orders and prescriptions.

[Sidebar]

Provides a complete audit trail of the workflow process.
Reduced the order fulfillment and billing time cycle.
Reduced institutional financial loss. Improved pharmaceutical supplier and vendor order processes.

[Author Affiliation]

Judy Bassett, manager of Publication Relations for LSS, can be reached at 301/595-20332033 or jbassett@issc.com.

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